"Still Waiting"

Still Bill, the Shoebill Meme, and July Fourth Waiting Culture Online

A Research Paper

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DOCUMENT NOTICE

This paper analyzes a circulating digital meme. All quotations from social media are paraphrased or anonymized. Field notes reflect the author's observations only.

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READING GUIDE

Sections 3-4 contain the primary analysis. Figure 1 appears in Section 4 and should be viewed alongside the caption discussion.

Abstract

This paper tracks the spread of "Still Bill," a deliberately bad Photoshop meme featuring a shoebill stork standing on the steps of Independence Hall wearing a colonial tricorn and holding a sparkler. The image is not real. Everyone knows it is not real. That is the point. Tagged #StillBill and #StillWaiting, the meme circulated heavily between June 30 and July 3 during both 2025 and 2026 Independence Day seasons. Through interviews, post analysis, archival comparison, and a small survey of CSU Long Beach students, I argue that Still Bill works because it compresses a familiar American feeling - waiting for something that was promised in 1776 and has not fully arrived - into a single absurd, shareable image. The bird does not move. Neither, users joke, does the country. This study contributes to ongoing conversations in folklore studies about how obviously fake images can still function as sincere cultural commentary.

Primary hashtags analyzed	**#StillBill, #StillWaiting, #Since1776**
Sample size (public posts)	**892 posts, June 28 - July 3, 2026**
Student survey respondents	**n = 14, CSU Long Beach, June 2026**

1. Introduction

Nobody thinks the shoebill was actually at Independence Hall. The lighting is wrong. The bird is too large. The tricorn is clearly pasted on in MS Paint. The sparkler glows over the bird's foot like a sticker from a different photo. And yet by July 2 of this year, my group chat had received the image four separate times with no caption, twice with only the words "still waiting," and once with just the number 1776.

> *"The flag post feels like pretending and Bill feels like honesty."*

I am calling the meme Still Bill because that is what most posts call it, though some use Still Waiting or simply Bill. The shoebill is a real animal, native to Africa, famous online for standing completely motionless for long periods. That stillness is the joke and also the whole argument. Still Bill is a Photoshop joke about a bird that does not move, posted every year before the Fourth of July by people who say they are tired of waiting. This paper tries to explain why that became a ritual rather than a one-day gag.

The question is not whether the image is authentic. It is why authenticity does not matter here. In most meme cycles, debunking kills the joke. Still Bill survives debunking because debunking is built into the format. The white outline, the mismatched sky, the sparkler pasted at the wrong angle - these are not failures. They are signatures. Users who "fix" the Photoshop often receive replies telling them to change it back.

2. Literature Review

Memes as Folk Objects

Digital folklore scholars have long argued that memes behave like proverb cycles: short, repeatable units that carry more meaning than their literal content suggests (Shifman 2014; Blank 2009). Still Bill fits this model but adds a wrinkle. The object being shared is not a moment captured in the wild but a composite everyone agrees is fabricated. That agreement does not reduce sincerity. If anything, it increases it, because the poster is not asking you to believe an event occurred. The poster is asking you to recognize a mood.

Earlier work on "post-truth" humor often assumes that fake images spread because audiences are credulous. Still Bill suggests an alternate pathway: fake images spread because audiences are exhausted by performance. A polished patriotic photograph demands enthusiasm. A bad Photoshop of a motionless bird demands nothing except a nod.

Shoebill Culture Online

The shoebill stork entered internet culture through zoo livestreams and short-form video, where its refusal to react became a meme in its own right by approximately 2020-2022. Commentary frequently describes the bird as "judging," "done," or "waiting for something that will never happen." Still Bill does not invent shoebill humor. It nationalizes it. The Independence Hall backdrop turns a general internet animal into a holiday-specific symbol without requiring new footage or new behavior from the bird.

THEORETICAL FRAME

I treat Still Bill as a waiting meme: a genre of holiday content that expresses deferred expectation rather than celebration. Waiting memes peak before the event, not during it.

Independence Day and Emotional Contradiction

Fourth of July media typically emphasizes unity, spectacle, and gratitude. Ethnographic accounts of the holiday also document ambivalence: financial stress, political division, family tension, and the sense that public celebration can feel mandatory (Pleck 2001; Schmidt 1995). Still Bill gives that ambivalence a visual form that is easy to share without starting an argument thread. The bird is not angry. It is not protesting. It is standing there. That posture reads as relatable across political lines in ways flag imagery often does not.

3. Methodology

This study uses a mixed-methods approach appropriate for emergent digital folklore. Because Still Bill has no official creator, institutional archive, or stable URL, the research relies on trace evidence: screenshots, cached posts, repost chains, and participant memory.

Content Collection

Between June 28 and July 3, 2026, I collected 892 public posts containing #StillBill or #StillWaiting using manual sampling across X, Instagram, Reddit, and Facebook regional groups. Posts were coded for image variant (A: Independence Hall standard; B: candle variant; C: parking lot variant), caption type, presence of the number 1776, and scheduled post time. Duplicate reposts of identical files were retained in the count because repetition is itself part of the ritual.

Interviews and Survey

Fourteen CSU Long Beach students completed a short survey in June 2026 about exposure to Still Bill, repost behavior, and open-ended reactions. Survey responses were anonymized. Two follow-up conversations were conducted over text. No participants claimed to have created the original composite.

Limitations

Platform algorithms make complete capture impossible. Deleted posts and private group sharing are underrepresented. I cannot verify the true origin account beyond cached evidence from June 2024. This paper therefore describes pattern and meaning rather than definitive authorship. That limitation is common in folklore research and, in this case, may be structurally appropriate: Still Bill works partly because no one owns it.

Coding categories	**7 primary, 19 subcodes**
Inter-rater check	**10% sample, 94% agreement**
Archive snapshots reviewed	**16 cached URLs, 2024-2026**

4. Findings

The Image and Its Anatomy

The standard Still Bill image follows a fixed template. A shoebill stork stands upright on the front steps of Independence Hall in Philadelphia. The bird faces the camera with the blank, patient expression shoebills are known for. A colonial tricorn sits on its head at a slightly wrong angle. It holds a lit sparkler in its beak or, in some variants, in one wing. The sky behind the hall is often a different color from the stone steps. Edges around the bird are faintly glowing. These flaws are not accidents. Reposts that "fix" the Photoshop usually get fewer shares than the original broken version.

Figure 1. The standard Still Bill image. Caption text most commonly reads "still waiting." Composite quality is intentionally poor.

Figure 1 represents Variant A, which accounted for roughly 71% of posts in the 2026 sample. Variant B replaces the sparkler with a white porch candle and appeared most often in Pennsylvania-adjacent groups. Variant C places the same bird and accessories in a suburban parking lot, preserving the tricorn and caption while abandoning the historical backdrop. All three variants retain the visible cutout halo around the bird.

> *"Nothing you can photograph happens there. That is why the bird is the photograph."*

The earliest version I could index was posted to a regional Pennsylvania Facebook group on June 30, 2024, with the caption "he's been there since the signing." The poster later deleted the account. Reverse-image tools show the shoebill cutout comes from a zoo photo and the hall background from a tourist stock image. Someone merged them in under ten minutes. The meme has been remade hundreds of times since, always keeping the same bad compositing on purpose.

Captions, Numbers, and Timing

Still Bill travels with a small set of repeated phrases. The most common is "still waiting." Others include "he hasn't moved," "since 1776," and "see you at the reading." None of these are explained in the posts. Users treat them like inside jokes for a holiday that has not finished happening yet.

The number 1776 appears constantly but rarely as a date. It shows up in filenames (still_bill_1776.jpg), in replies ("1776 and counting"), and in timed posts scheduled for 17:76 - which is not a real time, but phones still queue the post for 6:16 p.m. or the closest available minute. Participants describe this as "Bill time." I found repeated posting spikes at 4:44 p.m. and 6:16 p.m. local time across three time zones.

KEY FINDING

Activity is low all year, spikes June 30, peaks July 2-3, drops on July 4 afternoon, then returns July 5 with captions like "still there." This calendar is stable across both 2025 and 2026 samples.

Spread Patterns and Variants

Still Bill follows a predictable calendar. There is no central account. No creator taking credit. No merchandise page linked in bios. The meme replicates by copy-paste. Several survey respondents said they reposted the image instead of engaging with family group chats about fireworks plans. One described Still Bill as "my out for the holiday."

Variants have appeared: Still Bill on the Capitol steps, Still Bill at a barbecue grill, Still Bill in a Walmart parking lot with the same tricorn and sparkler. All keep the bad Photoshop look. Political accounts from multiple directions repost the image, but the meme itself does not stabilize into a single ideological message. That ideological emptiness may be a feature. Users can project frustration, humor, grief, or boredom without attaching a manifesto.

Eight of fourteen survey participants reported remembering the image after seeing it briefly, including details such as the tricorn angle or the sparkler glow. Two reported dreaming about a motionless bird on stone steps. I include this cautiously. It may reflect simple visual stickiness rather than anything deeper. Still, the image appears to lodge in memory more effectively than typical holiday content, perhaps because its absurdity creates a sharp recall cue.

5. Discussion

Still Bill is not cryptid lore. Nobody claims to have seen the bird in Philadelphia. Still Bill is not political campaign content in any organized sense, though political accounts repost it from every direction. It is not a call to action. The bird does not move. The caption does not ask you to vote, march, or buy anything.

What it is, as one respondent put it, is "a screenshot of how the holiday feels when you're not feeling it." That may be why the image stays obviously fake. A real photo would ask for belief. A bad Photoshop asks only for recognition. You see the hall, the hat, the sparkler, the bird that will not blink, and you already know what it means.

Why Obvious Fakes Spread

In a media environment saturated with AI-generated realism, Still Bill's low-effort composite functions as a trust signal of a different kind. Users are not fooled. They are invited. The visible paste lines say: this is not propaganda, this is a joke we are all in on. That invitation lowers the social cost of sharing during a holiday when many people feel pressure to perform happiness.

There is also a generational familiarity at work. Impact-font captions, animal cutouts, and mismatched backgrounds recall earlier meme grammars from the 2010s. Still Bill therefore feels older than its actual circulation history. Several respondents used the phrase "already old" to describe an image that, by archive evidence, is only two years deep. Folklore often compresses time. A meme can feel ancestral after one successful July cycle.

COMPARATIVE NOTE

Unlike celebration memes that peak on the holiday itself, waiting memes peak the day before. Still Bill is pre-holiday content about the holiday's emotional lag.

6. Conclusion

Still Bill works because it is easy to make, easy to repost, and impossible to take literally. It turns the shoebill's stillness into a joke about waiting - for liberty, for the holiday to mean something, for the Fourth to finally feel finished. Writing this on July 3rd, the day before Independence Day, the meme is already everywhere again. My roommate just sent me the image with no text. I knew what he meant.

Tomorrow there will be fireworks, speeches, and flags. Still Bill will probably be posted one more time at night with the caption "still waiting." The bird will not have moved. Neither will most of the people sharing it. That is the whole meme.

For folklore studies, the case suggests that sincerity and authenticity are not the same thing online. A user can share an obviously fake image in earnest. Still Bill offers a low-friction way to participate in a national holiday while admitting, visually and immediately, that participation can feel incomplete. Future research might compare Still Bill to other waiting memes in different national contexts, or track whether the 2027 cycle introduces new variants beyond the candle and parking lot forms documented here.

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Appendix A: Sample Captions

The following captions appeared repeatedly in the 2026 sample and were coded as primary phrase variants:

- *"still waiting"*
- *"he hasn't moved"*
- *"since 1776"*
- *"see you at the reading"*
- *"1776 and counting"*
- *"Bill time"*
- *"still there"*
- *"he was here first"*
- *"(no caption)"*

Appendix B: Survey Instrument (Abbreviated)

1. Have you seen the shoebill Independence Hall image before today?
2. Did you repost it? If yes, where?
3. What did the image mean to you, if anything?
4. Did you see it before July 4th or on the day itself?
5. Optional: describe any memory or dream associated with the image.

Author note: Patrick Williams, undergraduate, California State University. Field notes and coding sheets on file. Final draft completed July 3, 2026.